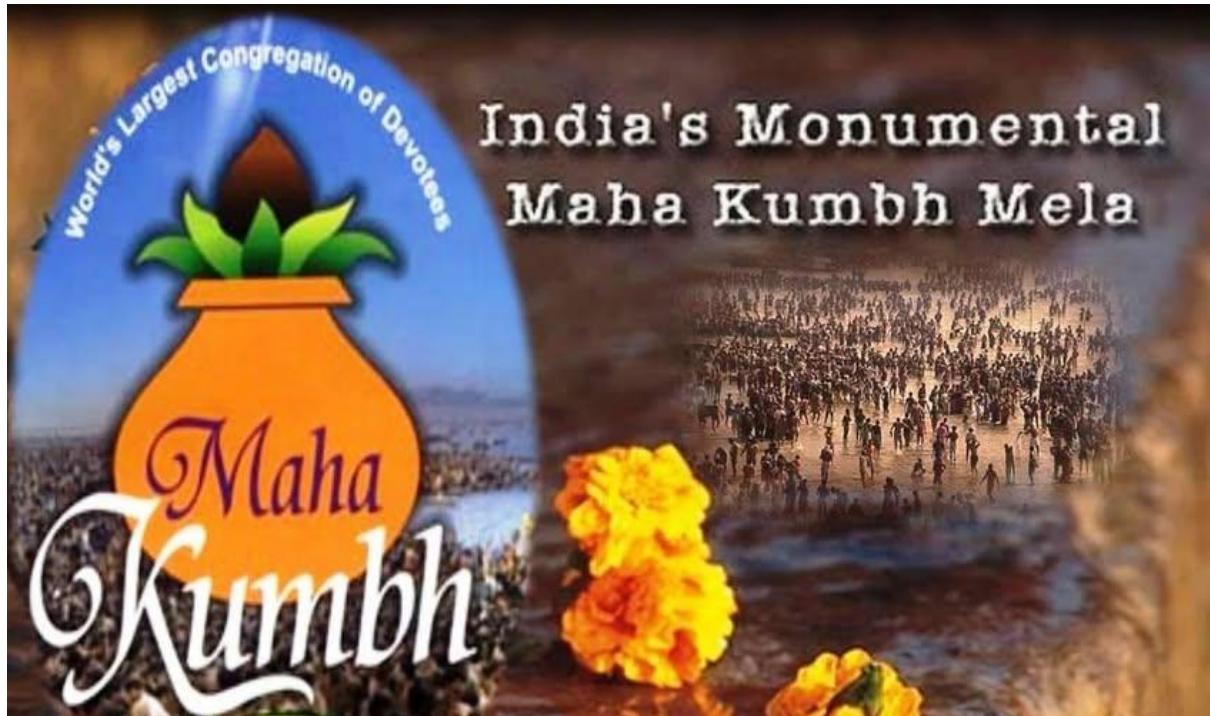




## **KUMBHA MELA**

(Significance of KUMBHA in the concept of KumbHamelA)



### **What does the term 'Kumbha' signify?**

Literally Kumbha means water pot; it signifies a container and water in the pot. In a religious parlance Kumbha is compared with Kalasha which is nothing but a Pot (Ghata) containing water with other ingredients.

Kalasha (Kumbha) is considered as highly auspicious and sacred symbol in Hindu religion. A Kalasha can generally be one of the following viz. earthen, copper, brass, silver, gold depending on one's capacity and occasion.

Kumbha is also an astrological sign Aquarius (Kumbha Raasi) 11th house in the natural zodiac whose Lord is Saturn.

Traditionally we come across Kalasha being used in all the Hindu religious rituals viz.

Nithya Karma;

Deva Kaarya (Daily Pooja, Homa, Vratha etc.);

Subha Kaarya (Marriage, Gruha Pravesa etc.);

Pithru Kaarya; during Shanti/Homa

Apart from the above we also come across Kalasha being used on special occasions like while welcoming a distinguished personality (Poorna-KumbHa);

In temple rituals we come across a ceremony called Kumbhabhishekam where, top of the temple tower (sikhara) denoted as KumbHa is given a ceremonial sacred bath with holy waters at the time of consecration and also at periodical intervals.

Kalasha sloka that we usually come across indicates the significance and symbolism of Kalasha.

Kalashasya mukhe Vishnu: kanTe rudrassamaasrita:

Muule tatra sthitho brahma madhye matrugana: smruta:

kukshou thu saagara:sarve sapthadveepa vasundhara

Rigvedo atha yajurveda: saama vedo atharvavana:

angaischa sahita ssarve kalashaambu samaasrita:

कलशस्य मुखे विष्णु, कण्ठे रुद्र समाश्रितः ।

मूले तत्र स्थितो ब्राह्मो मध्ये मात्रुगनास्मृतः ॥

कुक्षौ तु सागरास्सर्वे सप्त द्विपा वसुन्धरा ।

ऋग्वेदोऽपि यजुर्वेदः सामवेदो हयथवर्णः ॥

अन्गैश्चसहिता सर्वे कलशाम्बुसमाश्रिताः ।

Meaning...

Lord Vishnu resides in the mouth of the Kalasha,  
 Rudra in the neck; at the bottom Brahma resides;  
 in the middle are the divine mothers;  
 in the stomach exist all seas and seven islands of this earth;  
 Rig, Yajur, Saama and Atharavana Vedaas with all Vedaangaas  
 are also present in the water.



Reference of PurnaKumbha is found in the Skanda Purana and the Matsya Purana. In Skanda Purana it is mentioned that the 'PurnaKumbha' can be worshipped. Matsya Purana indicates that people placed it at their doors as a sign of plenty.

PurnaKumbha mainly contains 'water' – the veritable life principle. Thus, it is a direct worship of Varuna – the God of rain. He is the harbinger of rain which ensures fertility on earth and which nourishes animals and human beings.

The earthen pot used as PurnaKumba is decorated with geometric designs and Swastika. The geometric design varies from region to region and from community to community. Depending on the society and its wealth, earthenware gives way to silver, brass or gold pots.

Apart from water, PurnaKumbha is filled with twigs or leaves of five trees – Ashwatha (peepul), Vata (Banyan), Amra (Mango), Panasa (Jackfruit) and Bakula (Elengi). A lotus flower and a small bowl of rice are also put in the pot. The mouth of the pot is covered with a husked coconut, which is decorated from the sides with mango leaves.

Except for water, what goes in the pot varies from region to region. Mango leaves and the coconut is a constant factor in most areas.

All the items used in the Purna Kumbha signify life in its bloom and plenty. It also indicates that human beings are part of nature and when nature thrives human beings too flourish.

In a supreme sense, Kumbha signifies cosmic womb that of Lord Vishnu who is Hiranyagarbha and which is the source of origin of the universe from where the creation took place.

Universe the womb of Lord Vishnu being in the form of golden (cosmic) egg, He is referred to as **Hiranyagarbha** (SVSNS sloka # 44) which is the one from which creation took place and the one where all the souls rest when the world is deluged.

The water in the *kalasha* symbolizes the primordial water **SriManNarayana** from which the entire creation emerged. It is the giver of life to all and has the potential of creating innumerable names and forms, the inert objects and the sentient beings and all that is auspicious in the world from the energy behind the universe. The leaves and coconut represent creation. The thread represents the love that "binds" all in creation. The *kalasha* is therefore considered auspicious and worshipped.

Nara + Yana = Narayana. Nara is generally referred to the mankind and Yaana means the conveyance. Narayana means the conveyance or the sole vehicle for the human beings to depend upon for their ultimate journey of salvation.

The word Naara is also associated with another meaning for water. NaAraAyana means the one whose abode is water.

NaAraAyana according to this etymology is the one who moves (floats) in the infinite waters and is also the water itself, the one who lives in water.

Aaayana also means the direction and Naaraayana is the one who shows direction to the mankind towards the ultimate reality.

**aRcIṣMānArcitaH kumbHo...**

(Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram - Sloka # 68)

**Who is ArchishMaan? Who is ArchitaH?**

**ARCHISH**

Archi means a ray of light, a celestial splendour, a shining glory, the Light that lights millions of other lights; the divine LIGHT for the Universe;

Who else other than the Supreme God Vishnu who is the SUN/LIGHT that illuminates the Sun, Moon, Stars and all other entities that glow.

He is PRABHA/PRABHASA - PRABHAVISHNU - ARCHISHMAAN;

## **ARCHITAH**

the one who is worshipped, worshippable, to be worshiped;  
Who else? Lord Vishnu to be remembered/worshiped always is the greatest injunction of shastras/Vedas/Puranas; all other rules being secondary;

Lord VISHNU is worshipped (ARCHITAH) by one and all in the Universe including Brahmaadi Devatas at all times.

priINayaaAmo vaAsudevaM  
devataAmaNDaAkhaNDamaNDanaM

Sri Madhvacharya in his famous DwaAdasa Stothra (8th canto) eulogizes the Supreme God and recommend to Propitiate Lord Vaasudeva who is the most precious jewel (SarvaDevasikhaAmanih) in the august gathering of Gods headed by Lord Brahma.

KuMbha is one of the several thousand names of Lord Vishnu the reference to which we come-across in Sri Vishnu Sahasranama Stothram (sloka # 68) where He is eulogized as KUMBHAH;

He is the one who contains in Himself everything in the universe as water in a pot. Water is another form of Lord Vishnu (NaAraAyana) whose abode is water, the one who moves (floats) in the infinite water and is also the water itself. He is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient.  
aRcHishMaAnarcHitaH kuMbHo....

In Vaivasvatha Manvanthara during Ksheera saAgara Mathana; Lord Vishnu in Dhanvanthari roopa emerged out carrying Amrutha Kalasha (Kumbha). It is said that while carrying the nectar pot (Amrita Kalasa) by Lord Vishnu few drops of nectar fell at Allahabad (Prayaga), Haridwar, Nasik and Ujjain. These holy places (Theerthas) have acquired significant reputation

where human beings could wash their sins by way of sacred bath at these places.



Therefore, the concept of Kumbha-Mela is verily the worship of Lord Vishnu the Cosmic Womb (JgadYoni) and paying our obeisance to the primordial supreme God SriManNaaraayana who is present in all the Rivers and Theerthas as Antharyaami "namaH kamalanAbhAya namaste jalasHAyine"

Theertha is one of the attributes of Lord Vishnu who is Theerthakarah (Sri Vishnu Sahasranama Stothram sloka # 74); He is SarvaTheerthaAtmaka; Lord Vishnu is ever pure, auspicious and the one who sanctifies the Theerthas with His eternal presence; He is the energy; Pushkara the one who nourishes/gives pushti to the Theerthas;

Theerthas are an integral part of our civilization and culture that has grown and spread along the banks of these Theertha Kshethras. They have also played a significant role in the religious, philosophical/spiritual heritage of our country.

Theertha kshethras have eternal presence of the Supreme God SriManNarayana.

Theertha Yathra should not become a customary like visit to a picnic spot. Having spent money, one may have the satisfaction of completing a pilgrimage (Theertha Yathra). But in reality, it is not worthwhile without understanding its correct meaning and significance.

Theertha is a holy place of pilgrimage since time immemorial. Theerthas are seldom anonymous places. They all have their unique character and ambience. These places are the living symbols of tradition and culture of history.

Theertha Yathra is of no avail if a person does not lead a moral life. There is no use wandering about the pilgrim centres keeping the evil thoughts in mind.

One who does not have sraddha on Theertha-Yathra, One who is a Paapi, One who is a Nastik; One who doubts Theertha Mahima; one who is a HetuVaadi, will never reap the benefits/phala from Theertha-Yaathra.

**अन्य क्षेत्रे कृतं पापं पुण्यक्षेत्रे विनश्यति  
पुण्यक्षेत्रे कृतं पापं वज्रलेपो भविष्यति**

"anyakshetre kritam papam; punyakshetre vinashyati;

punyakshetre kritam papam; vajralepo bhavishyati;

Sins committed at other places is destroyed in a holy place, but the sins committed in a holy place (Theertha Kshetra) becomes firmly attached."

Therefore, one should understand the concept and significance of Theertha while doing Theertha Yaathra and utilize the opportunity and it should be a saadhana for self-upliftment and spiritual progress.

With this background knowledge (focus on the eternal presence of SriHari Sarvottama) if a Theertha Yaathra is made, it will help the pilgrims to cleanse their inner selves, wash out their

evil tendencies and open up before them a path or a direction for righteous living.

While going to a Theertha one must remember that it is meant for self-refinement and self-upliftment. Pilgrimage is for introspection; practice of penance and selfless service and for resolving to strive for an enlightened future.

India is a country flooded with spirituality, culture, heritage, traditions, myths, emotions, and faiths. Ever since the Epic days, all these features are reflected through festivals with a message always hidden behind them. Thus, these festivals and events have become navigators of the great Hindu culture and heritage called Hindu Dharma also known as Sanatana Dharma.

River worship in India is prevalent since time immemorial and rivers in India are adored on several occasions in the Hindu religious and spiritual calendar like Kumbh Mela, Pushkara etc.

Visiting the Kumbh Mela to take a dip in the holy waters and cleaning the sins committed in a lifetime is an apparent motive to attend the Kumbh Mela. The Kumbh festival is a life changing experience where a person can fill the spiritual void he or she experiences in the humdrum of busy urban life.

Kumbh Mela is a platform where ordinary men can interact with saints and priests and imbibe the knowledge possessed by the latter. It is an opportunity for everyone to dissolve the worldly stresses and flow in the cultural and religious effervescence of the festival. People can get acquainted with the elaborate Hindu rituals that take place during the festival and through association with the saints he or she can understand the significant Vedic principles behind the rituals. The festival is one of a kind and people can take the opportunity to witness this grand event and enrich themselves intellectually, religiously, culturally and introspectively.

Kumbh Mela is the greatest pilgrimage and festival in the Hindu religion. The event is a religious and cultural spectacle which occurs once in 12 years attracting participants from around the globe to take a dip in the holy waters of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati.

It is believed that a bath at the confluence of these three rivers increases the bather's purification by hundred times. Whereas during the period of Kumbh Mela (special dates assigned for spiritual bathing), it is believed that it is a thousand times stronger an influence. Apart from self-purification purposes, thousands of people also flock to the shores during Kumbh Mela to offer pinda for their departed ancestors.

Kumbh Mela, believed to be the largest religious gathering on earth is held every 12 years on the banks of the 'Sangam'- the confluence of the holy rivers Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati. The Mela alternates between Nasik, Allahabad, Ujjain and Haridwar every three years. The one celebrated at the Holy Sangam in Allahabad is the largest and holiest of them. Sangam adorns an altogether different look when it is time for the Kumbh Mela.

Holy Sangam is the site for Annual Maagh Mela; Ardh Kumbha Mela; Kumbha Mela.

Magha Mela is held every year between mid-January and mid-February starting from Makara Sankramana and ending with Maha ShivaRatri;

Kumbha Mela is held in general, once in every three years, moving in rotation among four riverside sites in India viz. Prayaga, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nasik.

Kumbha Mela will be held at Allahabad when Jupiter is in Aries or Taurus and Sun/Moon are in Capricorn during the Hindu month of Magha (January-February).

Kumbha Mela at Haridwar will be held when Jupiter is in Aquarius and Sun is in Aries during the Hindu month of Chaitra (March-April).

Kumbha Mela at Ujjain will be held when Jupiter is in Leo and Sun is in Aries, during the Hindu month of Vaisakha (April-May).

Kumbha Mela at Nasik will be held when Sun and Jupiter are in Leo during the Hindu month of Bhadraprada (August-September).

Maha Kumbh Mela attracts huge gatherings of pilgrims and others from all over the world. Allahabad is world famous for Maha Kumbh Mela held once in 12 years. It is said that, more than 30 million people take part in the mammoth religious carnival which is supposed to be the largest gatherings of people on the earth.

Ocean of humanity (men; women; sadhus; saints) from all walks of life irrespective of caste; creed; region; participate in this Hindu religious and spiritual fair (Kumbha Mela) in millions of numbers.

Millions of people assemble together at this sacred site for ceremonial processions, devotional singing, religious discourses, and other special activities for the religious. Monks and holy men and women from every Hindu sect converge together at this site to participate in this sacred and festive gathering.

### **Important days during MaagHa/Kumbha Mela**

- Makara Sankramana
- Shat-Thila Ekaadasi
- Pushya Bahula Amavasya
- Vasantha Panchami

- Ratha Sapthami
- Bheeshmaashtami
- Maagha Pournami – Maha MaAghi
- Kumbha Sankramana
- Maha ShivaRathri
- MaAgha Bahula AmaAvaAsya



## **PRAYAGA - THE THEERTHA RAJ (Triveni Sangam)**

Prayaga also known as Allahabad is a city in the State of Uttar Pradesh situated at the confluence of holy Ganges (Ganga) and Yamuna rivers.

It is one of the four sites of Kumbha Mela; other three being Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nasik.

It is a highly sacred and celestial place of importance since it is situated at the confluence (Sangam) of the holy rivers, Ganga, Yamuna and the invisible Saraswathi together called Triveni

Sangam. In Sanskrit Veni means river and Triveni means three rivers, and hence the confluence of three rivers is known as Triveni Sangam.

### **Pouranic significance of Prayaga**

Prayaga is called as Theertha Raj the king of all pilgrimage centers. Its sanctity has manifested by its reference in Puranas viz. Ramayana, Mahabharata etc.

It is said that, Lord Brahma, chose a land on the earth to perform 'Prakrista Yaga' at the beginning of creation and He referred to it as Theertha Raj or the 'King of all pilgrimage centers' and that was Prayaga Kshethra.

As per Padma Purana, Prayaga is best among all the places of pilgrimage.

The area of Prayaga is known as the land of Prajapathi and hence referred as Prajapathi Kshetra.

Trinity lords Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara are the presiding Deities of this region.

It is also called as Aaryaavartha since Aryans are said to have settled here first.

It is believed that all Devathas including Lord Vishnu along with Saptha Rishis eternally reside in Prayaga Kshethra.

At Prayaga Kshethra, Lord Vishnu is worshiped with 12 different names and forms known as DwaAdasha MaAdhav viz.

1. Vata Madhav,
2. Akshaya Madhav,
3. Moola Madhav,
4. Shankha Madhav,
5. Chakra Madhav,

6. Gada Madhav,
7. Padma Madhav,
8. Ananta Madhav,
9. Bindu Madhav,
10. Manohar Madhav,
11. Asi Madhav, and
12. Veni Madhav.



**Madhava** means,

one who is the consort of Goddess Lakshmi Devi,  
one who is the bestower and Lord of superior knowledge;

the one who is propounder or the one who advocates or the one who promulgate the knowledge of the Supreme being (Himself);

one who directs an individual towards performing of good deeds; attaining true knowledge;

Lord Sri Rama (along with his consort Sita Devi and brother Lakshmana) had spent some time in Prayaga kshethra at the Ashram of Sage Sri Bharadwaj before proceeding to near by Chitrakuta.

Yudhishtira (Dharmaraja) on the advice of Sage Markandeya took sacred bath at the confluence of Triveni Sangam after Kurukshethra war.

Prayaga has been known as the greatest pilgrimage since Rig-Veda era. The basic reason being the confluence of three of the holiest rivers in India, the Ganga, Yamuna and the invisible Saraswathi.

### **HOLY PLACES AT PRAYAGA**

**Sangam** (Triveni Sangam)



Sacred Sangam is the confluence of three of the holiest rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati which is also called as the river of enlightenment.

Prayaga is one of the four sacred spots where a few drops of the nectar 'Amritha" spilled while it was carried by Lord Vishnu during the episode of Ksheera Sagara Madhanam. Other three being Haridwar, Nasik and Ujjain.

These four places are called theerthas and considered holy by Hindus. Among them Triveni Sangam (Prayaga) is regarded as the holiest - Theertharaja.

These three rivers (Ganga-Yamuna-Saraswati) maintain their identity and are visibly different as they merge.



While Yamuna is deep but calm and greenish in colour;  
Ganga is shallow; but forceful and clear;  
Saraswati remains hidden, believe that she makes her presence felt underwater.  
Significance of Prayaga is widely known in the terrestrial and celestial universe. By bathing in the holy waters of Sangam one

is ridden of all sins and gets all his desires fulfilled. If it is coinciding with Kumbh and other sacred days (Parvakaala) the results are manifold and more meritorious.

Holy Sangam is the site for Annual Maagh Mela; Ardh Kumbha Mela; Kumbha Mela. Magha Mela is held every year between mid-January and mid-February. Maha Kumbh Mela attracts huge gatherings of pilgrims and tourists from all over the world.

Allahabad is world famous for Maha Kumbh Mela held once in 12 years. More than 30 million people take part in the mammoth religious carnival which is supposed to be the largest gathering of people on the earth.

Sangam is just 12 km away from Allahabad city railway station and can be reached easily by auto rickshaws that regularly ply on the route.

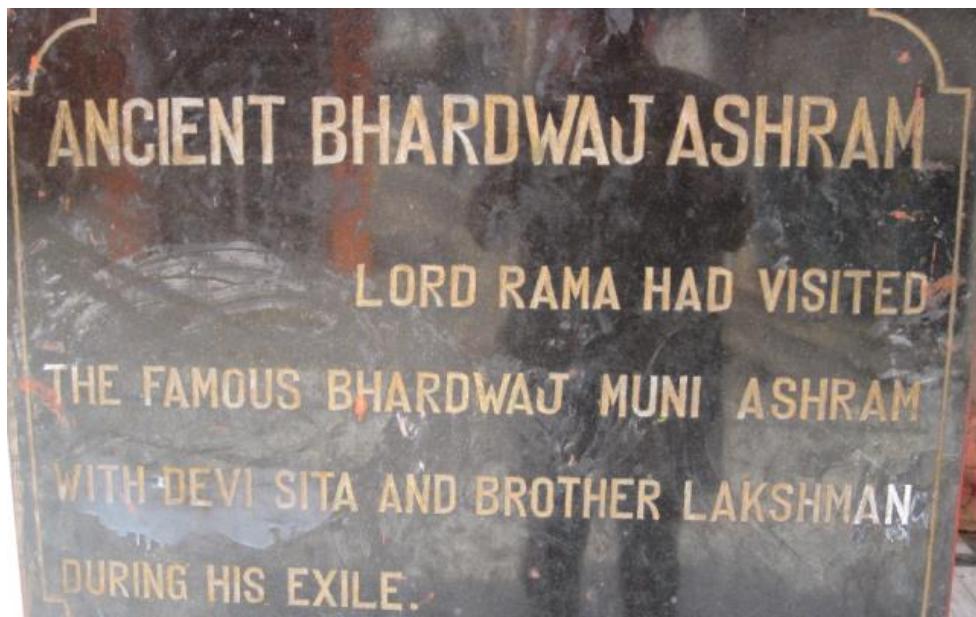
When once you reach there you have to travel by boat to the Sangam spot for taking bath and also for performing Veni Daana.

MaAgha Snaana at Prayaga (Triveni Sangam) gives 100 times of Ganga Snaana Phala

### **Bharadwaj-Ashram**

Located in Colnelganj of the city near Anand Bhavan, it is the place where Lord Sri Rama is said to have visited along with Goddess Sita Devi and Lakshmana to seek blessings of Sage Bharadwaj.





## Akshayavat

It is an eternal tree that is indestructible. It is located inside the Quilla on the banks of the river Yamuna. It is said and believed that anyone who prays at this tree or dies under it attains salvation and its branches hang out into the Yamuna River. It is said that Lord Sri Rama spent a night near this tree while on His way to the wilds.



## **Veni Madhav Temple**

As said earlier there are 12 Madhav Deities at Prayaga Kshethra but, the Veni Madhav temple at Daraganj close to the Sangam is significant.

It is a small temple with a small idol of Vishnu representing Veni Madhava and Lakshmi Devi.

As per inscriptions on the walls of the temple it is said that Lord Vishnu came to this spot as Veni Madhava to kill a demon who was trying to possess (by drinking) the three great rivers after he was cured of a skin problem when he took a bath in their confluence at Sangam.



## **ALOPI DEVI MANDIR (MadhavEswari)**

"Prayage Madhaveswari" also known as Alopi Devi Mandir is located in Alopi bagh to the west of Daraganj considered as one of the Ashtadasa Shakti Peethas. It is a unique temple where its presiding deity is in the form of a small wooden Jhuula (swing) which is placed above a marble platform.



Origin of the name Alopi (disappeared) lies in the Hindu belief that when various body parts of Goddess Sati Devi (chopped off by Lord Vishnu's Sudarshana Chakra) fell at various places they were sanctified as holy places for pilgrimage called Shakti Peetaas. The last part fell at this location thereby named as "Alopi" (where disappearance was concluded) and the holiest of all.

## **VENI DAANA AT TRIVENI SANGAM**

VENI means braid (woven) of hair. Veni Daana is performed at Triveni Sangam (Prayaga).

This is a practice being followed by married women for the longevity of their husbands. Husband is supposed to comb and plait wife's hair and after decorating it with flowers, the end of the plait is cut off and offered to the rivers at the confluence (Triveni Sangam) as a charity.

Normally hair floats on water but, at this place hair sinks straight to the bottom. Though hundreds of people offer their hair everyday, there is not a single strand of hair seen floating on the river.

### **THEERTHA VIDHI at PRAYAGA (Triveni Sangam)**

For observing and following theertha vidhi at Prayaga there are number of theertha purohits available who also provide dormitory facilities.

Majority are in the area of Daragunj which is nearer to the Sangam spot. Pilgrims can approach them according to their own sampradaya.

### **How to reach Prayaga?**

By Rail:

Allahabad is well connected by rail with several important cities viz. Calcutta, Delhi, Patna, Chennai, Mumbai, Gwalior, Kanpur, Varanasi etc.

By Road:

Allahabad is on the National Highways # 2 and 27. It is well connected to the rest of the country by road.

### **What can be done at Prayaga?**

Sacred bath at Triveni Sangam

Veni Daana

Sacred rites to forefathers (Theertha Vidhi)

Visit to holy temples

Sri VaAdiraArajaru made a special mention of Prayaga kshethra in his magnum-opus TheErtha prAbHandha eulogizing the glory of Triveni-Sangam & Prayaga Madhava.

He says, that a dip in the holy waters of Triveni-Sangam, will drive away the sins and one gets liberated from all miseries like the ice which melts away by appearance of the Sun on the eastern sky.

Extolling the glory of Lord Prayaga Madhava, Sri VaAdiraAjaru says... Hey, merciful and compassionate Lord Prayaga MaAdhava, please dwell in our hearts for always having your holy remembrance which will bestow upon us the merits of performing a Maha-YaAga.

In the glory of MaAgha Snaana it is said that wherever may be the place of taking bath; one should always remember/recollect/recite **Prayaaga** and pray Lord **Maadhava** Prayaga ☩ Prayaga ☩ Prayaga ☩



**Sri KrishnaArpanamastu**

**nAham kArtA hAriH kArta**